

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An electronic signature method comprising the steps of:

analyzing a target document to generate a representation having a structure;

generating an electronic signature from each structural element of the structure of the generated representation; and

concatenating the generated electronic signatures into a single signature corresponding to the structure of the generated representation.

2. An electronic signature method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of setting a level of attachment of electronic signatures to structural elements of the document, whereby precision of reliability judgment of a document with an electronic signature can be varied depending on the level.

3. An electronic signature method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein a rate of coincidence between the target document and the target document with an electronic signature is found from a rate of structural elements having authenticated electronic signatures to the whole structure.

4. A method according to claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein said concatenating step includes putting the generated electronic signatures in a row.

5. An electronic signature apparatus comprising:

means for analyzing a target document to generate a representation having a structure;

means for generating an electronic signature from each structural element of the structure of the generated representation; and

means for concatenating the generated electronic signatures into a single signature corresponding to the structure of the generated representation.

6. An electronic signature apparatus according to claim 5, wherein a level of attachment of electronic signatures to structural elements of the document can be

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